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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANILA 001663

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SUBJECT: EMOTIONAL FAREWELL TO PRESIDENT CORY

REF: MANILA 1618 ("ICON OF DEMOCRACY" PRESIDENT CORY
AQUINO PASSES AWAY)

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The August 5 funeral of former President Corazon Aquino brought the Philippine nation together in an outpouring of affection and respect, a moment unprecedented in recent memory. Much as Cory Aquino united Filipinos during the 1986 uprising against dictator Ferdinand Marcos, she also seemed to unite them in her death August 1 from cancer. Citizens from all walks of life flocked to her wake and funeral at Manila Cathedral, from the nation's elite clans and competing political parties to middle class and ordinary Filipinos. The children of Ferdinand Marcos, among other political rivals of the Aquino family, offered their condolences. Having shunned the Philippine government's offer for a formal state funeral, the Aquino family organized a moving two-hour requiem mass, and broadcast it nationwide. Eulogies by the Aquino family's priest and other key figures, as well as an unusually frank and campaign-like eulogy by the youngest Aquino sibling, actress Kris Aquino, illustrated the intense admiration that friends and family had for "President Cory." Notably absent -- and uninvited -- from the funeral was President Arroyo, who paid her respects privately in the early morning hours after returning from her U.S. trip ahead of schedule. Attending the funeral for the U.S. government, the Ambassador noted that the funeral ended not with sadness, but with an air of celebration. Funeral onlookers chanted "Cory" as the casket left the cathedral to join the cortege for the eight-hour journey to the cemetery, as throngs of Filipinos lined Manila's typhoon-flooded streets to pay their final respects and catch one last glimpse of their beloved president. END SUMMARY.

FUNERAL UNITES COUNTRY AND BITTER ENEMIES

12. (C) The gracious and star-studded August 5 funeral for former President Corazon Aquino capped four days of national mourning following her August 1 death from cancer, uniting the country in a wave of emotion unprecedented in recent years and, for many, unimaginable under any other circumstance. Having shunned the Philippine government's offer for a formal state funeral, the Aquino family nonetheless managed to bring together elites from competing clans and political parties, Manila's top celebrities, and ordinary Filipinos -- dressed in shorts and sandals -- to the two-hour long requiem, which was broadcast nationwide. The well-organized and beautifully executed mass at Manila Cathedral saw political rivals sitting in unlikely proximity, offering condolences to Aquino's survivors in between musical numbers by some of the Philippines' most celebrated talent. Former presidents Joseph Estrada and Fidel Ramos were present, as was Vice President Noli de Castro, seated in front of his bitter rival, Senator Loren Legarda, who will

compete for the presidency in May 2010 elections against Senator Manuel Roxas II, also present at the funeral. Members of Congress joined Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita, other Malacanang Palace staff, rows of business leaders, and many members from the Cojuangco/Aquino clan -- a reminder of how large and well-connected the combined family is. Following the Aquino family's decision to hold a private funeral mass in lieu of an official state funeral, Ambassador Kenney represented the United States. Most countries participated at the ambassadorial level, with the exception of East Timor and Indonesia, which sent their president and foreign minister, respectively.

13. (C) The August 4 second wake that preceded the funeral offered more conspicuous personalities a quieter opportunity to pay their respects to the Aquino family without aggravating family rivalries. Ilocos Norte Representative Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. and his sister Aimee Marcos, two children of the late dictator and former president Ferdinand Marcos and his wife Imelda, attended the August 4 services, setting aside for the moment their long-standing family feud with the Aquino clan, which continues to believe that Marcos ordered the 1983 assassination of Ninoy Aquino. Other former Aquino opponents expressed their condolences through the media. Retired commodore Rex Robles told reporters he was remorseful over his participation in the series of coup attempts against President Aquino from 1987 to 1989. Acknowledging Cory Aquino's compassion, Robles admitted wavering at one time, certain that if Aquino extended her hand to them, he and his cohorts would readily surrender. Cory, he said, was well-mannered and sincere; her "aura was

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her armor."

EULOGY AS POLITICAL PLATFORM

14. (SBU) Eulogies at the mass remembered and celebrated President Aquino's accomplishments and character. In the most surprising remarks, a tearful Kris Aquino, the youngest of Aquino's children, claimed in her speech to be her "mother's favorite" because she, of all her siblings, was most like her father. Effusive with thanks for the public's "respect, appreciation and love," Kris pledged to continue her parents' crusade for democracy and better governance alongside her older brother, Senator Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, whose career she promised to support. The remarks drew applause from the audience, an indication of some support for Kris' possible foray into politics and away from her successful television career, a path often tread in Philippine politics. Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay, an Arroyo opponent and Aquino ally who was active in the anti-Marcos movement, threatened a "political upheaval" against Arroyo should she stay in office beyond 2010. Malacanang Palace officials criticized Binay for using Cory's death to encourage anti-Arroyo sentiment, and expressed hope that the occasion would instead be a moment for national reconciliation.

15. (SBU) Aquino family priest Father Catalino Arevalo, whom Aquino had hand-picked to deliver the homily at her final mass, highlighted to great applause three of Aquino's traits which endeared her to the Filipino people: selflessness in loving country above family, deep faith in God, and courage. He described Cory as a "true queen" who "truly held our hearts in the gentleness and greatness of her own." Bataan Bishop Socrates Villegas, a friend of the late Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin, who himself was Cory's ardent supporter and one of the key players in the EDSA I "People Power" revolt, also delivered a moving address. He described Cory as a "woman born to wealth and plenty," but who chose to live "in simplicity and humbly carried our misery." "We will never meet a woman as great as (Cory) for a very long time." Although reluctant to bid farewell, he expressed happiness at

the thought of Cory reunited in heaven with her late husband, Ninoy. In his remarks, Manila Archbishop Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales hoped that the country's next president would have the qualities of both Cory and Ninoy.

PRESIDENT ARROYO'S ABSENCE

¶6. (SBU) President Arroyo, who was not invited to the funeral by the Aquino children, paid her respects separately in the early morning hours August 5 after returning ahead of schedule from a U.S. trip that included a meeting with President Obama. Arroyo and Aquino, having been at odds over differing political views and Arroyo land-reform measures that affected Aquino family holdings, did not reconcile before Aquino's death. Reports noted that the Aquino family was angered by the Arroyo government's decision to withdraw two security details during Aquino's last days, prompting the Aquinos to decide against a state funeral. While the funeral was officially private, it maintained strong public character, supported by President Arroyo's proclamation of ten days of national mourning and the lowering of flags to half-staff. As an additional sign of her respect, Arroyo led a separate mass for Aquino on August 5 at Malacanang Palace.

PRIVATE FUNERAL, PUBLIC SALUTE

¶7. (U) Recalling the political activism that President Aquino was able to ignite in her supporters, funeral onlookers in the rear of the cathedral, mostly ordinary Filipinos, chanted "Co-ry!" as the casket left the cathedral to be loaded onto a flower-covered flatbed truck to lead the cortege. Throngs of Filipinos braved torrential rains and lined the flooded streets of Manila's modest neighborhoods to pay their final respects and catch one last glimpse of their beloved president on her 20-kilometer journey to Manila Memorial Park cemetery. The televised funeral and procession lasted 10 hours altogether and was graced by full military honors of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, including a 21-gun salute. Funeral organizers estimated the huge but courteous crowd inside the cemetery reached 30,000 people. Before and during the funeral, Filipinos honored the memory of Aquino by signing the letter "L" with their hands -- for "laban" (fight) -- and in wearing yellow, a color that became Cory's hallmark symbol of resistance against Marcos and of

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her presidency.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) As demonstrated by the tremendous outpouring of emotion these last few days, the courageous spirit of Cory Aquino, ingrained in the public psyche, appears ready to outlast the life of the woman herself. The Aquino funeral brought the nation together in a rare outburst of affection and respect. Sworn political enemies shared pews with each other at the funeral; military officers who sought to overthrow the Aquino government even offered their respects. President Arroyo's opponents, like Makati Mayor Binay, likely hoped the funeral would reinvigorate and unify the opposition, but the throngs were clearly intent on honoring President Cory, not reenacting the EDSA revolt. The funeral was, nonetheless, a very political event and an unusual demonstration of the power of the Philippines' various political clans. Many members of the funeral audience saw in Kris Aquino's remarks an indication that she would likely enter the political arena. The exception to the ephemeral amity between families was the cool reception offered President Arroyo; while she was treated civilly, her decision not to attend the funeral illustrated the continuing animosity between the Aquinos and Arroyos -- and, in a more general sense, the rancor that exists among the Philippines' powerful political clans. While powerful clans dropped their

fists for a short moment out of respect for a much-beloved president, it is clear that the families remain prepared to defend and promote their interests as they head toward the 2010 national elections.

KENNEY